

Strategies Making Language Features Noticeable in English Language Teaching

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The purpose of this study is to suggest effective strategies for the development of communicative ability in ELT (English Language Teaching) by investigating learners' perceptions on strategies making language features more noticeable. The assumption in the study is based on the idea of output-oriented focus on form instruction, supporting noticing function of output that attention, awareness, and consciousness form the cornerstone of the entire process of second language acquisition. The questionnaires comprised 12 questions related with the research questions on what strategies might be effective to noticing and matching for language learning. The findings showed that restatement, repetition, expansion, error correction, imitation, and translating Korean utterance into English were perceived the best strategies for getting notice regardless of English proficiency levels. However, discussion and command were perceived not effective for the learners with intermediate and lower English proficiency. A slow speech rate was the strategy which made the learners with lower English proficiency more attentive than those with higher English proficiency.

Key Words: Out Hypothesis, noticing, perceptions, strategies

1 Introduction

Second language acquisition is a complex phenomenon that cannot be completely described and proved by any existing model today. However, there exists a general agreement among researchers in the fact that no individual can learn a second language without input of some sort and not all input is equally beneficial to acquisition. In addition, some studies found that only exposure to targeted language is not sufficient for SLA and that learners' cognitive process, noticing is important.

There is now a general consensus that noticing is a prerequisite for learning to take place (Ellis, 1995; Robinson, 1995; Schmidt, 1990, 1995, 2001; Schmidt and Frota, 1986). Noticing takes place when learners pay attention to a certain linguistic feature as input. Therefore, formal instruction promotes noticing. Output and feedback are also helpful for noticing in SLA.

The current view of output is that it is not only the means by which learners

practice their interlanguage for greater fluency, but also a potentially important cause in the acquisition process (Shin, 2003). Swain (1985, 1995, 1998) proposed in her Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, the function of output is related directly to Noticing Hypothesis, which assumes that learners notice the gap between their interlanguage and the target language form and their noticing promotes acquisition. She argues that learners need not only comprehensible input but also comprehensible output, suggesting that the failure of French immersion students to reach native-like levels might be due to the lack of opportunities to participate in classroom conversation.

This suggests that it is not the mere amount of input given to learners, but the quality of input, that is meaningful and noticeable input that really matters in L2 acquisition. In sum, without learners' attention to the form, the teacher's use of target language itself does not guarantee the development of communicative language ability for the students. Accordingly appropriate teaching and learning strategies should be taken into consideration in provoking learners attentive to language form.

The purpose of this study is to investigate learners' perceptions on which strategies make the learners more attentive in typical college English classes according to learner's English proficiency.

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Role of noticing in second language acquisition

The communicative approach to language teaching, primarily focusing on using language for meaningful interaction and for accomplishing tasks, rather than on learning rules, has been widely popular since the 1980s (Shin, 2003). However, Harley & Swain (1984) found that when classrooms are entirely meaning-focused, some linguistic features do not ultimately develop to target-like levels. This implies that only negotiation of meaning cannot promote acquisition, and thus, focus on form is required, which is the second language instruction to connect grammatical form to meaning during primarily communicative tasks, as proposed in Long's revised interaction hypothesis (1991). In general, focus on form is designed to promote noticing of target forms. He claims that negotiation facilitates acquisition through focus on form, drawing attention to the linguistic form during negotiation of meaning and communication.

Early works devoted to the role of attention in second language acquisition were those of Schmidt (1990, 1993, 1994). Schmidt's main point was that noticing something in the input is crucial to acquisition, and once the learner notices something in the input, it automatically becomes intake. According to Schmidt, "Noticing" is an acquisitional prerequisite for the comprehension, processing, and eventual integration of new grammatical knowledge. Noticing by definition involves awareness and consciousness. Thus, noticing includes awareness, and awareness presupposes attention. Hence, attention is central to any concept of noticing. In sum, attention, awareness, and consciousness form the cornerstone of

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the entire process.

Swain (1995, 1998, 2005) has proposed four functions of output, one of which is the noticing function. Especially output by interlocutors who are non-native speakers or whose targeted language is better than the learners' promotes learners' targeted language. Learners receive feedback from interlocutors through interaction. Moreover learners' noticing the gap in their interlanguage, or between their interlanguage and interlocutors' language will help learners with their memory system for acquisition. Thus, formal instruction, output, and feedback from interaction are all effective.

Likewise, Gass (1997) argues that output makes learners aware of their gaps as Swain (1995) said. Her five stages interrelates and conceptualizes the various facets of second language acquisition. They are proposed to account for the conversion of input to output: apperceived input, comprehended input, intake, integration, and output. According to Gass (1997), the first stage of input utilization is the recognition that there is something to be learned. Apperception is the process of understanding by which newly observed qualities of an object are initially related to past experiences. Apperception is an internal cognitive act in which a linguistic form is related to some bit of existing knowledge. Another level in the process of acquisition is comprehended input. Comprehended input becomes intake. Intake is the mental activity that mediates input and grammars. After the intake component has performed its task of processing the input and matching it against existing knowledge, integration occurs. The fifth stage is output. Output makes learners aware of their gaps. Accordingly, output has the effect of making the brain more alert to the language in general. Learners become more attentive to the language.

The implications we can get from these studies are that it is appropriate to let learners be engaged in meaningful language use for their exposure to the target language and it is necessary to let learners draw attention to particular language features and their errors after they have used the language for interaction.

2.2 Strategies eliciting noticing in ELT

Opportunities for noticing alone are not enough, if the teachers and learners lack the strategies to take advantage of them. Since noticing is a conscious cognitive process, it is theoretically accessible to training and development. This suggests that the teacher's role is to develop noticing strategies that the student can learn the language.

In terms of language acquisition, it has been suggested (Schmidt and Frota, 1986) that two kinds of noticing are necessary conditions for acquisition. First, learners must attend to linguistic features of the input that they are exposed to, without which input cannot become 'intake'. Second, learners must 'notice the gap', by making comparisons between the current state of their developing linguistic system, as realized in their output, and the target language system, available as input. In the classroom, the first kind of noticing is customarily promoted through activities and procedures involving input enhancement (Sharwood Smith, 1993), whereby targeted features of the input are made salient in order to facilitate their

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becoming intake. Second, for noticing the gap, Skehan (1998) suggests the importance of “usefulness of training language learners in effective processing, to make them more able to notice relevant clues in the input so that form-meaning links are more likely to be attended to. Strategies for eliciting gap-noticing can be drawn by Noticing Hypothesis of Schmidt (1990).

- (1) Other things being equal, the more frequent a form, the more likely it is to be noticed. This stresses the need to provide repeated opportunities to notice a form.
- (2) The more a form stands out in the input stream, the more likely it is to be noticed. That is, we need a technique to highlight a form.
- (3) Instruction, following on from the previous influence, may play an important role, by making salient the less obvious aspects of the input, so that it is the learner who does the extraction and focusing as a function of how he or she has been prepared.
- (4) Some people will be more effective at processing input than others, meaning they will be more able to ‘notice’.
- (5) Readiness to notice will be affected by the current state of the learner’s interlanguage. What the learner learns is what they ready to attend to at that time.
- (6) The demands made on the learner, by the task in hand, will affect the ability to notice. If the task is unfamiliar, this will place higher demands on the learner, making noticing less likely.

Considered by Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis above, form-salient strategies such as ‘repetition’, ‘imitation’, and ‘previewing’ could be taken into consideration as some of effective noticing strategies according to ‘learner’s language proficiency level’.

Through the research, two research questions were posed: (1) Which strategies can make language features more noticeable for comprehensible output in ELT? (b) Are there significant differences in noticing according to learner’s language proficiency?

3 Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in the study were 113 college students in Korea made up of 34 males and 79 females. They all attended the same college in Gyeonggi Province near Seoul. Their ages ranged from 19 to 27. They were taking a three-hour long general English courses per week taught by the author. The course was conducted mostly in English. The average score of their Mock TOEIC Test taken in the beginning of the spring semester in 2008 was around 400 points, with the highest being 560 and the lowest 295.

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3.2 Instruments

This study used questionnaires (attached in Appendix 1), based on the research questions asking for (1) Which strategies can make language features more noticeable for comprehensible output in ELT? (2) Are there significant differences in the effectiveness of strategies according to learner's language proficiency? There are various ways to let learners attentive to the form and structures of the language. Questions for strategies to draw students' attention to target language structures for L2 structure acquisition through comprehensible output consisted of 12 items. They are 'repetition', 'a slow speech rate', 'restatement', 'expansion', 'error correction', 'command', 'imitation', 'discussion' or meaning-based interactions, 'translating Korean utterance into English whenever learners happen to utter Korean', 'previewing', 'English with pictures and drawing', and 'English with gesture'.

3.3 Procedure

The course the participant took was designed to provide practical situational English and to enhance students' communication ability in English in the various fields. Focus is placed on real, meaningful and purposeful English frequently used on campus. A total of 113 participants were surveyed at the end of semester. All data were divided into three groups labeled Higher Group, Intermediate Group, and Lower Group, based on the mean scores of their self-reported English competence. Kang and Park (2005), in their survey on students' perception of the effectiveness of English mediated classes at a Korean university, found a strong positive correlation between the students' self-assessed English proficiency and learning outcomes in English mediated classes.

In order to identify factors affecting students' perceptions about the effectiveness of using English as a language of instruction, frequency analysis and a series of chi-square test were carried out on individual students' responses.

4 Results

4.1 Research question 1

The research question 1 was, "Which strategies can make language features more noticeable for comprehensive output in ELT?". The specific questions were about repetition, a slow speech rate, restatement, expansion, error correction, imitation, discussion, translating Korean utterance into English, previewing, English with drawing, English with gesture, and command. The results are as follows.

4.1.1 Repetition

Repetition was perceived absolutely effective for noticing language forms, as the Table 1 below shows (H: 87.5%, I: 91.8%, L: 95.2%). There were no significant differences among English proficiency levels in using repetition for noticing

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language forms in class. However, the lower the English proficiency was, the more *repetition* was perceived effective. This result implies that *repetition* should be an effective strategy in second language learning and teaching to make information more comprehensible.

Table 1. Frequencies and Proportions of Repetition

English Proficiency Level	Very Important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	5(62.5)	2(25.0)	0	1(12.5)	0	10.126
I	37(50.7)	30(41.1)	5(6.8)	1(1.4)	0	(.119)
L	16(76.2)	4(19.0)	1(4.8)	0	0	

4.1.2 Slow speech rate

As the Table 2 shows, *a slow speech rate* in EFL class was recognized as an important strategy for noticing language features (H: 50%, I: 68.9%, L: 90.5%). However, the lower the levels are, the more the learners perceived a *slow speech rate* was an effective for noticing language forms. The responses imply that *a slow speech rate* could be required much more for the low English proficiency group rather than the high English proficiency group.

Table 2. Frequencies and Proportions of Slow Speech Rate

English Proficiency Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	2(25.0)	2(25.0)	3(37.5)	1(12.5)	0	
I	27(36.5)	24(32.4)	22(29.7)	1(1.4)	0	10.503
L	8(38.1)	11(52.4)	2(9.5)	0	0	(.105)

4.1.3 Restatement

Most participants (H: 100%, I: 75.6%, L: 81%) regarded *restatement* or repetition in other words, as a useful strategy (Table 3) like *repetition*. In particular, the higher English proficiency group perceived *restatement* the best strategy for getting notice of language features.

Table 3. Frequencies and Proportions of Restatement

English Proficiency Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	4(50.0)	4(50.0)		0	0	
I	26(35.1)	30(40.5)	16(21.6)	2(2.7)	0	3.891
L	6(28.6)	11(52.4)	4(19.0)	0	0	(.691)

4.1.4 Expansion

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Expansion, supplementing learners' incomplete words or sentences, to help them notice the language, was also considered a useful strategy by all three English proficiency groups (H: 87.5%, I: 83.8%, L: 81%) as Table 4 shows.

Table 4. Frequencies and Proportions of Expansion

English Proficiency Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	1(12.5)	6(75.0)	1(12.5)			
I	25(33.8)	37(50.0)	11(14.9)	1(1.4)		3.808
L	9(42.9)	8(38.1)	4(19.0)			(.703)

4.1.5 Error correction

As shown in the Table 5, the strategy of *error correction* for noticing the language forms in ELT class was considered important by most participants (H: 87.5%, I: 81.2%, L: 81%).

Table 5. Frequencies and Proportions of Error correction

English Proficiency Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly Important	Not important	(p)
H	3(37.5)	4(50.0)	1(12.5)			
I	26(35.6)	34(45.6)	13(17.8)			4.178
L	8(38.1)	9(42.9)	3(14.3)	1(4.8)		(.653)

4.1.6 Imitation

The strategy, *imitation*, which focuses on the form of sentences in order to facilitate learners' language production, was reviewed (Table 6). The result showed that most participants (H: 87.5%, I: 82.2%, L: 81%) perceived the imitation important as expected like *error correction*.

Table 6. Frequencies and Proportions of Imitation

English Proficiency Level	Very Important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly Important	Not important	(p)
H	3(37.5)	4(50.0)	1(12.5)			
I	26(35.6)	34(46.6)	13(17.8)			4.178
L	8(38.1)	9(42.9)	3(14.3)	1(4.8)		(.653)

4.1.7 Discussion/ small group activities

The importance of discussion/small group activities was indicated by approximately half of the participants (H: 37.5%, I: 60.2%, L: 57.2%) as shown in the Table 7.

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Discussion and small group activities which are to develop sentence production in a meaningful situation in ELT turned out not as salient as other strategies such as imitation, error correction, etc.

Table 7. Frequencies and Proportions of Discussion/ Small Group Activities

English Proficiency Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	3(37.5)		4(50.0)		1(12.5)	
I	12(16.4)	32(43.8)	24(32.9)	4(5.5)	1(1.4)	12.136 (.145)
L	3(14.3)	9(42.9)	7(33.3)	2(9.5)		

4.1.8 Translating Korean utterance into English

Whenever learners happen to utter Korean in class, the instructor translated Korean into English. *Translating into English* was perceived effective for getting notice of language forms by most participants (H: 87.5%, I: 76.4%, L: 89.5%) as shown in the Table 8.

Table 8. Frequencies and Proportions of Translating Korean Utterance into English

English Proficiency Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	1(12.5)	6(75.0)	1(12.5)			
I	21(29.2)	34(47.2)	15(20.8)	1(1.4)	1(1.4)	5.700 (.681)
L	9(47.4)	8(42.1)	2(10.5)			

4.1.9 Previewing

According to the Table 9, 62.5% of the learners with higher English proficiency, 83.6% of intermediate, and 90.5% of lower English proficiency learners considered *previewing* contents important. The lower the levels are, the more the learners perceived that previewing contents was a helpful strategy for noticing language forms.

Table 9. Frequencies and Proportions of Previewing

Level	Very Important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	3(37.5)	2(25.0)	3(37.5)			
I	27(37.0)	34(46.6)	11(15.1)	1(1.4)		4.280 (.639)
L	9(42.9)	10(47.6)	2(9.5)			

4.1.10 English with drawing/pictures

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As shown in the Table 10, over half of the participants (H: 75%, I: 58.9%, L: 61.9%) perceived using *English with drawings or pictures* important for noticing language features.

Table 10. Frequencies and Proportions of English with Drawing/Pictures

Level	Very Important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	1(12.5)	5(62.5)	2(25.0)		0	
I	12(16.4)	31(42.5)	24(32.9)	6(8.2)	0	4.113 (.661)
L	2(9.5)	11(52.4)	8(38.1)		0	

4.1.11 English input with gesture

In the responses on *English input with gesture* for noticing language features, over 60% participants (H: 75%, I: 72.9%, L: 61.9%) perceived English input with gesture important. Table 11 shows the responses of each level of learners.

Table 11. Frequencies and Proportions of English Input with Gesture

English Proficiency Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly important	Not important	(p)
H	5(62.5)	1(12.5)	2(25.0)		0	
I	22(29.7)	32(43.2)	19(25.7)	1(1.4)	0	.138
L	2(9.5)	11(52.4)	7(33.3)	1(4.8)	0	

4.1.12 Command/Request

The majority of participants did not prefer the strategy provided by *command/request* (H: 50, I: 30.1%, L: 38.1%) as shown in the Table 12. The strategy was not recommended in ELT class comparing other strategies. In particular the lower the levels were, the less the importance of the strategy was.

Table 12. Frequencies and Proportions of Command/Request

Level	Very important	Important	Mediocre	Hardly Important	Not important	(p)
H	1(12.5)	3(37.5)	3(37.5)		1(12.5)	
I	3(4.1)	19(26.0)	41(56.2)	9(12.3)	1(1.4)	10.056 (.261)
L	3(14.3)	5(23.8)	10(47.6)	3(14.3)		

In summary, learners perceived that strategic methods such as *repetition, slow speech rate, restatement, expansion, error correction, and imitation*, were important in class for noticing the language forms and structures to improve English communication. And then, *English input with picture/drawing and gesture* were favored by all three groups. *Command* was not highly regarded as an effective strategy for improving the ability of low level learners.

4.2 Research question 2

The research question 2 was, “Are there significant differences in noticing according to learner’s language proficiency?”. The results were as follows.

4.2.1 Higher English proficiency group perception

Participants with higher English proficiency replied about the importance of each strategy in the following order as shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Higher English Proficiency Group Perception on Strategies

100%-90%	89%-80%	79%-70%	69%-60%	59%-
	-Repetition(87.5)	-Gesture		-Slow speech(50)
	-Expansion(87.5)	(75)		-Discussion(37.5)
(100)	-Correction(87.5)	-Picture/ drawing	-Previewing (62.5)	-Command (25)
	-Imitation(87.5)			
	-Translation(87.5)	(75)		

Higher level learners of proficiency considered a restatement strategy as the prior strategy for getting notice (100%). Next, repetition, expansion, correction, imitation, and translation (87.5%) were considered important for getting attention. However, discussion (37.5%) and command (25%) were not considered as important strategies.

4.2.2 Intermediate English proficiency group perception

Intermediate level learners of English proficiency replied in the following order as shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Intermediate English Proficiency Group Perception on Strategies

100%-90%	89% - 80%	79% - 70%	69-60%	59-
	-Expansion(83.8)		-Slow speech	-Picture
	-Repetition (91.8)	-Previewing(83.6)	-Translation (76.4)	-rate(68.9) (58.9)
	-Imitation(82.2)			
	-Error Correction(81.2)	-Gesture (72.9)	-Discussion (60.2)	-Command (30)
	-Restatement(81)			

Like the higher English proficiency group, repetition was considered as a very important strategic method (91.8%). Other important strategies were expansion (83.8%), previewing (83.6), imitation (82.2), error correction (81.2%), and restatement (81%). However, command (30%) was not regarded important.

4.2.3 Lower English proficiency group perception

Lower English proficiency learners showed in the following order as shown in Table 15.

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Table 15. Lower English Proficiency Group Perception on Strategies

100%-90%	89%-80%	79%-70%	69%-60	59%-
	-Translation(89.5)		-Gesture	-Discussion
	-Restatement(81)		(61.9)	(57.2)
-Repetition(95.2)	-Expansion(81)	-	-Picture	-Command
-Previewing(90.5)	-Error correction(81)		(61.5)	(38.1)
	-Imitation(81)			
	-Slow speech rate(81)			

Being similar to higher and intermediate English proficiency levels, repetition (95.2%) was a highly recommended strategy for English production. However, being different from higher proficiency levels, previewing (90.5%) was perceived as a fairly effective strategy for getting notice. Next, translation (89.5%), restatement (81%), expansion (81%), error correction (81%), imitation (81%), and a slow speech rate (81%) were considered effective. Command among other strategies was not perceived as important as the other strategies for getting notice.

5 Conclusion

According to the research, in order to acquire more communicative proficiency, it is necessary to let learners be engaged in meaningful language use for their exposure to the target language and draw attention to particular language features. Based on the above idea, this study set out to investigate two main research questions: (1) Which strategies can make language features more noticeable for comprehensible output in TETE? (2) Are there significant differences in noticing according to learner's language proficiency? From the view of learners' perception on strategies affecting for acquisition of language forms, there were not statistically significant differences among the proficiency levels. However, the following conclusion can be drawn.

Restatement (H: 100%, I: 81%, L: 81%), repetition (H: 87.5%, I: 91.8%, L: 95.2%), expansion (H: 87.5%, I: 83.8%, L: 81%), error correction (H: 87.5%, I: 81.2%, L: 81%), imitation (H: 87.5%, I: 82.2%, L: 81%), and translating Korean utterance into English (H: 87.5%, I: 76.4%, L: 89.5%) were considered highly effective strategies for all levels for getting notice. However, discussion (H: 37.5%) was perceived not effective for higher English proficiency group among the strategies. That implies discussion strategy was not well developed to be salient in this class that it needs to be developed for getting notice. Command among the strategies was perceived not effective for intermediate and lower English proficiency groups. The reason may be caused by the teaching techniques of the instructor or the affective aspect of the learners.

Despite the contributions of this study presenting effective strategies for getting notice in ELT, several limitations need to be addressed for the future research. First of all, it was conducted by only one instructor and a small number of learners participated in this study. Larger data collected from more diverse populations of EFL learners need to be included in the statistical analysis. Also, the proficiency was only on the base of self-reported evaluation to measure the level of

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English proficiency. Taking these limitations into account, the above things should be considered in the future studies.

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Appendix A.

Questionnaires

1. Gender () 2. Age ()
3. My English Proficiency Level : Upper () / Average () / Low ()

How much do you think the following items makes you attentive to language forms which enhance the development of English communicative ability in English Class?					
	VI	I	M	HI	NI
1. Repetition					
2. Slow speech rate					
3. Restatement					
4. Expansion					
5. Error Correction					
6. Imitation					
7. Discussion					
8. Translation					
9. Previewing					
10. Drawing					
11. Gesture					
12. Command					

VI: Very Important, I: Important, M: Mediocre, HI: Hardly Important, NI: Not important